

PRESS CONFERENCE

**MAJOR GENERAL JEFFERY HAMMOND, COMMANDER MULTI-NATIONAL
DIVISION BAGHDAD; AND MR. JOHN BASS, DIRECTOR OF PROVINCIAL
RECONSTRUCTION TEAM – BAGHDAD**

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**MAJ. GEN. JEFFERY HAMMOND, MR. JOHN BASS, AND VARIOUS MEMBERS OF
THE MEDIA**

REPORTERS 1-9

REP1 = REPORTER 1

(PH) = PHONETIC

MGEN HAMMOND: Listen, good afternoon. I'm Major General Jeff Hammond, and I command the Multi-National Division Baghdad, and that includes about 28,700 soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines -- and probably more important, their families back home.

I'm joined today on my left by my partner, Mr. John Bass who's the team leader of the Provincial Reconstruction Team here in Baghdad. He and his team play a major role, and I'm proud to have him alongside me as a partner.

Now, today we're going to provide you an update on the progress we've made here in Baghdad. Our operations in partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces and the Government of Iraq have really resulted in some very positive developments here across Baghdad, across all of our lines of effort.

First, though, our mission remains unchanged. And in partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces, it is to protect the people of Baghdad. We have been successful in setting the conditions here in Baghdad for sustainable security and eventual transition to the Iraqi Security Forces.

But let there be no doubt, numerous challenges still remain. Security has improved. Let there be no doubt. And our job is to keep it that way, simple as that.

Now, I'm going to provide you some details here in a few moments. But just as an example, we're averaging four attacks per day here in Baghdad. And of those four attacks, and maybe more important with our mission to protect the population, only one of those four daily is targeting the population, the people. Now, this is a result of our continuous partnership and work with the Iraqi Security Forces to pursue those -- to relentlessly pursue those who threaten security. You need to know that my, my mantra is "attack, attack, attack" -- whether it's targeting the enemy or it's clearing operations or it's distributing micro-grants, or whether it's improving the lives of the Iraqi people. I attack, we attack, we always stay on the offense, focused on what's next best for the people.

Now, clearly the Iraqi Security Forces are taking the lead. They conduct operations all over the city. I'm directly partnered with General Abud, the Commander of the Baghdad Operational Command. And I think you heard him say on more than one occasion, we are one team with one mission. Now, almost all

operations are conducted in partnership, and we coordinate, train and fight together on a daily basis as a single command to make this happen.

Now, as we highlight today, this improved security has facilitated our ability to work with the Government of Iraq to improve the quality of life for residents of Baghdad and move closer to a state of normalcy.

You know, a list of projects that have been invested in here are absolutely staggering. And we move closer to our goal of improved coordination and partnership with the Baghdad provincial governor in these efforts. While we still have much to do, there has been significant improvement across this city. You know, you can see the results as you move around. And if you can't see the results, then come see me and I'll take you and I'll move you around. There's -- There's traffic jams, there's increased congestion. There's markets full of people; there's parks full of people, swimming pools with kids swimming. There's Eid celebrations. You know, frankly, this change is quite impressive to see.

Now, there's other positive, important and developments as well such as the passage of the Provincial Election Law and follow-on elections, the return of internally displaced civilians, and the Government of Iraq assumption of the Sons of Iraq, which these are all signs of progress. And these are all critically important here for the future of Baghdad. They must succeed, and our job is to ensure their success.

Now, take for example, the transition or transfer of the Sons of Iraq to Government of Iraq control. Now, we have two phases to this plan. The first one is the transfer of the Sons of Iraq to the, to the Government of Iraq control, which will include the assumption and the payment of their salaries starting this month in October. We're working very closely with our Iraqi counterparts to make sure this works. The Government of Iraq has committed to accept responsibility for the Sons of Iraq and it's been mandated in the Prime Minister Order No. 118-C, and we're going to be there to assist in the transfer. We spent the last few weeks working hand in hand with the Iraqi Security Forces, the IFCNR, our Iraqi partners and I'm confident -- I'm confident this is going to go well. But again, effective this month, the Government of Iraq will start paying the salaries for the Sons of Iraq.

Now, the second phase will occur over time, and that's the government transitioning the Sons of Iraq to long-term employment, to give them a job.

Now, the Sons of Iraq paid a heavy price in fighting al Qaida and other insurgent groups. And the Government of Iraq acknowledges the importance to transition them into meaningful employment. Twenty percent of the SOI's will transition into security forces and we're working with the Government of Iraq to help provide job skills and training for those that want to pursue future employment. We've made some progress. We transitioned 3,400 Sons of Iraq to the Iraqi police in Baghdad. But this effort's going to take time. There's still another 7,000 Sons of Iraq right now who want to become police, policemen here in Baghdad and their, their request for that, their administrative request have worked its way through and it's now with the Minister of Interior, waiting for them to offer final approval, issue them hiring orders and send them off to schools. So there's additional 7,000 more Sons of Iraq right now, today, that are ready with hiring orders to be trained to become police, to provide long-term security and stability here in Baghdad.

The important thing we should recognize that the government is committed, the government is committed to taking care of the Sons of Iraq, and I've seen evidence of this across Baghdad. We will not abandon the Sons of Iraq. We will continue in partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces to ensure they get paid and that the transition occurs to meaningful employment. This is, without doubt, a significant opportunity for the government to demonstrate to the people of Iraq and to the rest of the world that they're serious about reconciliation and about honoring its promise to the Sons of Iraq.

Now, as I've outlined today, we see many positive developments, indicators of change; however, we're not there yet. Though significantly degraded, al Qaida and the Special Group criminals are still capable of conducting terrorist attacks. And we will pursue 'em, to kill or detain 'em. Simple as that. It is Rule of Law, and they will follow the Rule of Law here in Baghdad.

Now, essential services such as sewer, water, electricity, trash and medical care still need significant improvements across the city. You know that. The improvements in security have provided an opportunity for the Government of Iraq now to improve these essential services. If the government does not, our concern is the citizens will be dissatisfied and the opportunity will be there for

the enemies here in Iraq to exploit. I'm talking about al Qaida, other extremists, to make efforts to try to regain support. Now, feed back from the population, the people I talk to, and I'm out there every single day -- they tell me that electricity continues to be their No. 1 concern. Now, we continue to support and assist the government as it addresses these deficiencies, but the conditions are right in Baghdad now to improve in these critical areas.

Electricity is clearly the responsibility of the Government of Iraq, and the people of Baghdad are looking to their political leaders to make this work. But it is important to acknowledge that the success we've achieved up to that -- to date is not irreversible. Our task is to support our higher headquarters, and that goal is to help the Iraqis achieve its full sovereignty and ensure Iraq moves from a fragile state to a stable state. Baghdad is central to this effort; we must transition improved security into sustainable, durable security.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is still much to do here in Iraq. Now, I'd like to go through a few slides to, to give you a little bit better picture of some of the things we're doing.

The first slide here just gives you a snapshot of the security here, the arrangements in Baghdad. You can see they've got five U.S. brigade combat teams. And within each one of those boxes we display the number of Iraqi Security Forces, Iraqi police and the Sons of Iraq, which are all partnered as one team here in this security effort. We'll add, too, that the Iraqi Army and the national police are conducting more and more independent operations every day.

Okay. The next slide is -- gives you a -- shows how the attacks in Ramadan decreased from 2006, 2007, 2008. The daily average in 2008 was four -- a little bit more than four attacks per day. 2007 is 26 attacks per day, and 2006 was 39 attacks per day. Now, why are these attacks down? I think it's continuous offensive operations. I think, though, it's a matter of partnership, working together with the Iraqi Security Forces. It's people on the streets having the moral courage to stand up and, and share information. And it's our ability to react to that. I -- I would give a lot of credit, though, quite frankly, to the Iraqi Security Forces under the command of General Abud. They have flat-out gotten after it. They have done a remarkable job, continuing to press the enemy, to not give the enemy a single moment to regroup, to rethink its

strategy, but to continue relentlessly -- maintain, maintain, maintain and press 'em.

AIDE: Next slide, sir. Go ahead.

MGEN HAMMOND: Okay. The next slide depicts al Qaida activity during Ramadan. I will just tell you that the overall numbers, like I showed -- they have decreased. You can see that down to 11. The Iraqi Security Forces prevented much of this. There have been 68 al Qaida targets that were killed or detained during the month of September. 68. And I think you've heard about one of the key ones, the leader of the Rusafa al Qaida network, Abu Rami, who we -- he was a key leader of the network, responsible for the VBID attacks. He is responsible, over a 34-day period, for six VBID and two suicide vest attacks, most of 'em along the Karadah peninsula. He was the guy that was responsible; he was the mastermind. And he's no longer around. He was eliminated.

AIDE: Go ahead, sir. Next --

MGEN HAMMOND: All right. The next slide shows some of the counter-VBID operations that we're working on here in Baghdad. Any single VBID or suicide vest attack in Baghdad is one too many. Any one

of 'em is one too many. We continue to improve and work hard on our operations to counter the attacks by al Qaida. It's interesting to note that some of the things that we're doing in the Karadah peninsula, if you go down there today, it's 100 percent vehicle checkpoint inspections. We're developing -- We're putting together a hasty traffic control points. We're doing a series of intelligence-driven cordon-and-knock operations, and we're registering people. We're trying to get a better handle on the things that we probably need to do a little bit better at. And it's very encouraging, the direction we're headed there right now. We will continue to keep pressure on the enemy.

AIDE: Go ahead, sir.

MGEN HAMMOND: Displayed on this slide are nine significant cache finds from the last 45 days. This is interesting. Throughout Baghdad there have been over 2,000 cache finds since December 2007. 2,000 cache finds since December of 2007. We continue to work hard at this. We continue to support our partners, the Iraqi Security Forces, to reduce the number of weapons available to the terrorists and to the criminals. But really what makes it easier for us is many of these have been because citizens have turned in tips; they've called us,

contacted, and they shared information. You know, the more the citizens do, frankly, the more safer Baghdad's going to be.

This next slide talks about the critical components of security, the Sons of Iraq. The Sons of Iraq have been responsible for finding over 149 caches since December of '07. The threat they pose to al Qaida and other criminal elements is well known by the enemy. And it's evident by the fact that they've been attacked 166 times that we've recorded. So they're in the middle of this thing. The Government of Iraq has recognized their patriotism, their commitment to transfer them to Government of Iraq control, assume their salaries and transition them eventually to long-term employment.

Now, the registration to date is pretty much complete in Baghdad. We've registered over five -- 50,000 -- it was about 51,000 Sons of Iraq, and we're in the process of completing the transfer to Iraqi control, government control, so we can start paying 'em. We're working closely with the government, with the ISF -- We even conducted a rehearsal of this entire operation recently with all the right leadership to ensure we've got it right. And we'll conduct one more rehearsal this month because it's that important, and come November, that we make the payment and it happens right, the

government does it right. The -- Any failures can be exploited by the enemies of Iraq. And I really see this as al Qaida's last opportunity to regain the initiative here in Baghdad. It is the decisive fight for al Qaida. I think that they're going to exploit any opportunity they can find with this SOI transfer and transition in order to reestablish their presence in Baghdad. They're going to try to exploit the Sunni fears and concerns over the transition; they're going to try to discredit the government and drive a wedge between the SOI's and the Iraqi Security Forces to regain their lost support from the population. Our task is to prevent this from happening. Right now all indications are the Government of Iraq, the Iraqi Security Forces, and the Sons of Iraq understand the importance of this transition, and right now I think we're all seeing it the same way.

As the security situation in Baghdad improves, I think you're aware more and more families are returning. I was Hadar (ph) last week, and I think I counted 18 truckloads of family members trying to move back in. It's a good process. The Iraqi Security Forces are on the lead for the return of these folks to their rightful home. It's increasing the confidence of the population in the process. And as of right now we had over 36,000 families have returned here in Baghdad. And that's only those that have registered with either the

DAC, the NAC, or resettle -- or the resettlement committees. Many have actually just worked, worked through it themselves and moved in. But I have 36,000-plus that we can account for. And each day it continues to happen. Very positive. Very positive.

And the next slide, just -- I'd just ask you just to look at it a second. I -- I'll just go around each one of these photos and just quick description.

Area Gold, you know that's the southern half of Sadr City. We've invested in over 212 projects, about a \$70 million investment north of Sadr City. The government has invested over \$85 million in, in essential service improvements, making life better. Right now these projects have employed over 6,000 laborers in Area Gold. Improved the standards of living. In the civil service departments, we've got 32 projects to employ over 1,800 individuals. As we speak right now, today, in Jihad we have a significant number of young men going through training so that they're going to be a significant part of the civil service department in the future.

Airport Road, it's a \$60 million project for your Airport Road, which is funded by the government. It will be completed by

March '09. Major Saboor (ph) has got the lead for this. He's done a remarkable job in bringing this project forward.

We've had over 3,500 businesses started as a result of micro-grants as well. We've generated, we think, over about 64,000 jobs here in Baghdad. And the micro-grant program we have has generated on its own over 13,000 jobs.

And finally, down to Radwaniyah, which is a rural tribe area to the southwest of Baghdad, we're seeing the benefit of many projects to fix their canals and other facilities for their agricultural development. We're implementing over \$8.8 million in projects to try to get things more positive, and the projects developing their agriculture -- and tremendous agriculture potential. And I'm seeing it right now, each day we're seeing that thing develop.

And this is just a slide that shows you how they're strong -- there's evidence, you know, evidence that demands a verdict. Here's your evidence: Life is returning to normal one step, one day at a time here in Baghdad. We've opened eight -- we've opened eight swimming pools. Now, we're looking at an additional 11 more pools. There's kids in swimming pools. Solar lights. Over 600 solar lights have been installed. We have an in-state plan for 4,000

solar lights. The installation and maintenance creates jobs. The lights don't require - power off the electrical grid here in Baghdad. It's solar-powered lights and increases security. The Jadriya Lake and the Baghdad Zoo, we've reopened parks. The zoo continues to be improved. You have the Children's Memorial in East Rashid, which memorializes the children killed in 1987 when an Iranian Scud missile killed 43 of these kids under the age of 12. It was further damaged by an al Qaida attack. That's undergoing renovation as we speak as well. The schools, we -- we know the importance of education and we're working to assist the Minister of Education in his lead and his rightful role to continue to improve upon this. And then health clinics under the lead of the Minister of health, we've seen over \$1.3 million spent on refurbishing 12 key health clinics in Baghdad. We're working on 11 more. I think our partnership with the Minister of Health has been absolutely critical to all of this.

Now, take a look at this, this slide. I think it's an interesting picture. And I saw this the other day when I was flying around Baghdad. Is there any other greater indication that things are improving, life is trying to get back to normal here? Those are folks at the different parks. Those are people that are enjoying their lives. This is last weekend, showing the local citizens

enjoying Zawra Park in Khark. And they even hosted a fireworks display as well on Thursday and Friday evening. I think there's increasing confidence by the people in the security situation. And part of that confidence is the people assuming responsibility for security by supporting the government, supporting the Iraqi Security Forces, and being willing -- being willing -- to assist these great men and women in their endeavor for security by handing over, through tips, criminals, that we're acting upon.

And then my final slide highlights our efforts to inform the population, which you'll see here in a moment. It's -- You know, you see this all over. And we're not going to let up. Those that choose not to follow the Rule of Law, they can't be a member of this environment in Baghdad society under leadership of the mayor, the governor, provincial chairman, the Prime Minister and people that are -- have stood for and stepped up to the task.

I'm very excited to have with me today my esteemed partner, Mr. John Bass. He's the team leader of the Baghdad Provincial Reconstruction Team. And now he's going to provide you with an update from his perspective.

Sir.

MR. BASS:

Thank you, General Hammond. Just to give you a little bit more of context about me, I am a senior member of the U.S. Foreign Service which is the United States diplomatic service. And I'm privileged to lead a group of civilians, military personnel, and some local Iraqi partners in working closely with Multi-National Division Baghdad and the Multi-National Division just south of here, Multi-National Division Center in the southern and eastern kadahs (ph) of Baghdad Province.

I'm going to presume that most or all of you know a little bit about what Provincial Reconstruction Teams do and what our missions are. But I'm happy to circle back to that during the question period if you have more specific requests on that front.

I would just note, as you'll see on this first slide, that the Provincial Reconstruction Team for Baghdad is the largest of its kind in Iraq. And that reflects the importance of Baghdad, both the city and the province, to what we are collectively -- And when I say "we," I mean both the United States and the Iraqi government -- are trying to achieve here in Iraq. I also coordinate the activities of several smaller PRT which are embedded with the brigades that General Hammond mentioned earlier. We together, both -- All of these

teams comprise about 225 civilians, military personnel and some, some Iraqi partners. We work, as I said, very closely with, with General Hammond and his staff and with the brigades in the field.

But frankly, our most important relationships are with Iraqis, with elected officials here in the city and across the province, with government employees in the Amanat, in the governate and the provincial council and the district councils; with private businessmen, with professors at the various universities around town and with lawyers and doctors and other professionals that, taken together, really form and stitch together the fabric of society here in Baghdad.

I am very aware, as are all of my colleagues, that this is their country, and it's your country, and your province. And as guests here, we believe very strongly that the work we are doing at the PRT needs to reflect the priorities identified by those partners.

General Hammond spoke quite a bit about the security transitions underway and the improvements in security. Those transitions really inform and are informing the way we go about our work at the Provincial Reconstruction Team as you'll see from the next slide.

As conditions have changed in the province and in the city, our approach to pursuing the needs of the Iraqi citizens has changed in response to that. You'll see on the left-hand side the term "capacity replacement." That refers to a period of time when the Coalition was engaged in work here in the province in part because the security environment did not permit the established institutions in the province to actually get out and perform those services themselves. I think we're much further along that scale to the other side of the equation, to what we consider to be capacity development where we are partnering with institutions here in the city as part of what I would call a "civil transition" to help them take the next step in providing those services themselves, to get better and more capable in addressing the needs identified by the Iraqi citizens through -- throughout the province, whether here in the city or further out into the kadhabs (ph) and to meeting those needs according to Iraqi priorities. Obviously very still -- a very long way to go. The provinces -- or the challenges here in the province are complex, they're hard, and frankly, they're all interconnected. And it's very hard to, to untangle a very complicated set of problems and address just one of them at a time. But it's clear to me that many people, both inside and outside government and across society here in Baghdad are determined to

take advantage of the improved security that General Hammond has outlined, to make the most of that improved security, and to begin tackling the longer and deeper and broader challenges that Iraqi society faces as it tries to return to, to a more normal state.

We see a lot of movement in the right direction. The first thing I would point out is that clearly the national government has recognized that Iraq's basic infrastructure and the infrastructure here in Baghdad needs a lot of work to account for, frankly, decades of neglect and a number of years of conflict. More importantly, it hasn't just recognized that that need is there, it's actually applied money to that problem. The provincial government in all three of its facets, the Provincial Council, the Amanat and the Governate, have received approximately 1.4 trillion Iraqi dinar this year alone to address the infrastructure needs of the province. And that money has come as a consequence of those institutions prioritizing their needs and developing a plan to address those needs that was submitted to the national government, and on the basis of which the national government funded those needs.

So we see the beginning of a very important system of identifying priorities and funding according to those priorities. And I think as

General Hammond noted, you're starting to see some of the results of that funding visibly on the streets in Baghdad. Airport Road is a great example of that. That is a project entirely funded by Iraqi government money. And it's being executed by members of the Amanat in a supervisory capacity and contractors hired by the city to perform that work.

I'd also point out the repairs to the bridge over the Grand Canal north of the city. It's another great example of a project that was identified as an urgent need to be addressed because of the impact it was having on commerce and, frankly, traffic patterns, that the government put money against and moved quickly to address. And I think that project is close to being completed so that there will again be two-way traffic north of the city.

Some of it, as I said, you've been able to see the results of that funding. In our conversations with officials at the city and the governate level, we understand that, frankly, all of that money that's been allocated by the national government has projects put against it that are in various stages of contracting and bidding and awarding and project design.

There's clearly a lot more that needs to be done. It's not possible to correct the long period of neglect and the damage caused by terrorism and conflict over a number of years. It's not possible to correct that in a short number of months.

And it's also clear that new infrastructure is needed to keep pace with Baghdad's growing population and its growing needs. And to me, I think this, this big challenge in terms of repairing and developing new infrastructure really points to, I think what is really one of the greatest challenges today for elected officials here in the province, and that's to try to, to match up with the rising expectations of Baghdad's citizens. Clearly with the improvements in security, Baghdad's residents, whether they live downtown or live further out, are really hungering for improved services. They're hungry for better living conditions. They want to see a stronger economy and more employment opportunities. And after coming out of a period of conflict, it's understandable that people would be impatient to see those changes realized. It's been clear to me from the outset that there are an enormous number of people across this city and this province who are proud of this city and its rich history and who want to return it to its prior status as a center of commerce and learning.

Our job at the PRT is to help the elected government and those members of civil society who are interested in specific pieces of this. Our job is to help them realize their ambitions and to get better at their specific responsibilities as you'll see from the, the next slide.

This gives you just a quick snapshot of some of the things we're about as we move forward. The top piece shows you projects that are currently underway that are, frankly, carryovers from the period when there was less capacity among Iraqi institutions to perform some of this work. We've built schools; we've renovated schools. We're rebuilding some health clinics. We're extending some potable water networks in muhallahs that previously didn't have good service.

But more importantly, as you look further down on that slide, you get a sense of the ways in which we are addressing specific needs identified by Iraqi officials for expertise, for training, and for connections to professionals in similar fields in the outside world who can help them catch up with what they've potentially missed, whether it's been over the last five years or, frankly, over a, an earlier period when there was a comparative isolation for professionals here in the country. We want to help them

reestablish those professional networks and links so that they can go about their business and tap into the enormous set of resources and skills and expertise in the wider international community that is potentially available to help them as they proceed.

Our longer objective here, what we're after through this process, is helping Iraqi officials; helping Iraqi professionals create sustainable, self-reinforcing systems that, frankly, will endure long beyond our departure and will be capable of sustaining and providing the services that Iraq's citizens have asked for and that they, obviously, richly deserve. We look forward, on the diplomatic side, to a period when we've returned to a more normal bilateral relationship with the Government of Iraq and at which point in time my colleagues, who will be representing the United States here at the embassy, can engage with people on that more normal footing where we're potentially providing a little bit of expertise, but I hope at one point we'll be learning as well from, from the experiences of these elected officials and professionals as they work to revitalize the city.

And with that overview, I'm going to turn it back over to General Hammond to, to take your questions.

MGEN HAMMOND: Thanks, John.

Okay. We'll take some questions. Sir, we'll start right here in the front.

REP1: Yes, sir. My name is Jim Wade, Random Links News. I apologize. My name is Jim Wade, Random Links News, Los Angeles, California.

Sir, I was embedded earlier this year with the 10th Mountain Division up in al Rashad, al Shuwadah (ph) North, al Shuwadah (ph) South, New Baghdad, that area there. Up in al Shu- -- up in al Rashad the kids, wherever we go, chant, "USA, USA, USA." Al Shuwadah North, their showing of affection for Americans is blowing us kisses. Al Shuwadah South is giving us the thumbs-up. In the squatters' area there along the perimeter, the showing of affection for Americans is simply they want a soccer ball, that's all they want.

Now, isn't this truly a great success? What do you attribute to that success, sir? That when they see us comes, they run to us. And they tell me that when they saw Saddam coming, they ran from him.

MGEN HAMMOND: I'm glad you saw that. But I'm very cautious about, about jumping on the bandwagon of success. I want to be honest. I'm very cautious. I think we have achieved a certain level of security right now that has yet to be truly defined as sustainable security.

We have truly achieved a degree of security which is allowing us right now to shift our balance and do more of what Mr. Bass has been talking about, working governance and essential services. Right now that's probably the most important -- my most important view I see right now of the conditions I have here with security.

Security at one point was defined in terms of the kinetic fight: Us detaining or killing criminals or al Qaida or those who wish to go against the Rule of Law. And I see ourselves now redefining security now on a much more broader terms, and those terms being defined with respect to governance and economics, essential services and jobs. So it is very encouraging; I agree with you. It's very encouraging what we see out there, but, but I will also say that, that the real hero, if there -- the real leadership hero here has come at the hands of the Baghdad Operational Command and General Abud. It's absolutely amazing how he and his general officers, his brigade commanders, his battalion commanders -- it's

amazing how hard, how dedicated -- how hard they're working towards this, how dedicated they are and how they're improving each and every day. I'm very proud and I'm very encouraged by the signs that I see. Thank you.

AIDE: Sir?

REP2: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: Nina Organization. Sir, I'll ask you about the Special Groups. You have posted some pictures of these people in Baghdad. The question that is people who connects between al Qaida connection, between al Qaida and Special Groups. Those people who are saying that Iran are supplying al Qaida with weapons. Can you give me some kind of picture about these weapons or where they originated from and how these weapons are affecting security in Baghdad. And how many of these wanted people have fled to Iran from the list you saw on the slide?

MGEN HAMMOND: Well, first the wanted people, as you described, who have fled to Iran. There still remains many of these criminals outside the country here located in places such as Iran. I do know that for a fact. And many of them have communicated their desire to return

here to Baghdad. And when they do return, they'll be detained or they'll be killed unless they choose to follow the Rule of Law, which is -- which is critically important to understand.

As far as the Iranian weaponry, we have, over time, through our -- the many, numerous caches that we've discovered, have found certain munitions that were clearly manufactured in Iran. Now, how they made their way into Baghdad, that's -- that's a whole different matter altogether. But the point is we have found weapons that were made in Iran which clearly suggests Iranian influence in matters here. And on a daily basis we continue to work hard to find as many as caches as we can to protect the people here, of Baghdad. Thank you.

REP3: (Inaudible) James (inaudible) and the security monitor. Please, may I ask whether, as the number of attacks in Baghdad have decreased, whether there have been any recent trends noted in the style of incidents taking place now compared to incidents taking place...

MGEN HAMMOND: I'm sorry. I didn't hear. The mike -- Could you say... The microphone's not working, guys. Try it again. I understand you said "decrease in attacks"?

REP3: Yes. Following the decrease in attacks, whether there've been any recent trends noted in the style of the more recent incidents? So even though the number have gone down -- or these attacks have gone down, has there been any change?

MGEN HAMMOND: The attacks have gone down. We continue to see -- we continue to see the IED's. We have seen the vehicle-borne IED's and suicide vest attacks, which, on Rusafa side of the river which we attribute to the Rusafa AQI emir, who we have since eliminated. And we have seen a slight -- very so slight increase in some small arms-precipitated attacks. But the attacks -- although the attacks have gone down, the menu of different types of attacks have pretty much remained consistent. Thank you.

AIDE: Sir.

REP4: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: The Iraqi commanders, they always talk about successes and they are confident that the security is going to be sustained and terrorists will not be back. But the Iraq -- American command, they always say the security is fragile; yes, there's improvement,

but there's no guarantee. How can you relate this message to the Iraqi so they can feel comfortable, and what you could warn 'em against?

A question to the general about rebuilding. Reality, many of the generals who accomplish a lot of -- accomplished by any other general -- generals -- what are the projects were accomplished by you guys?

MGEN HAMMOND: Well, I'll take on -- we'll try to may be answer that together, a little bit.

I think if you talk to General Abud, the Baghdad operational commander, if you put him in one room and you could talk to him about security and you put me in a separate room and you ask us the same questions, I'm pretty certain we'll give you the same answers. We both -- We both see positive improvements in security here across Baghdad -- clearly, without any question. But the threat still remains out there. No doubt in our mind. And we continue to press the enemy from one end of Baghdad to the other to detain, capture or kill. I think we have a common view there.

I would dispute just a little bit the suggestion you made that Iraqi general officers see it's a little bit different than the Coalition general officers. We are partners; clearly we're partners. I spend almost every day with the Iraqi general officers talking strategy, talking execution, and actually being on the ground with them, walking, talking, meeting, listening to people. It is a partnership. So I would slightly dispute your suggestion, and I would argue that we do have a very, very common view.

As far as the projects that, that we have supported, the Government of Iraq, in pursuing here to improve life -- the quality of life for the people, I showed you those slides. There's very numerous. I would suggest the one that's really interesting, I think, I'd love to take you out and show you, is the investment we've made in the schools. We have made some significant changes through renovation, through reconstruction, and even sponsorship. We've developed a sponsorship program with the Coalition units here, where back in the United States of America, local communities there are sponsoring specific schools here in Baghdad. And with the sponsorship relationship, kids on each side, each side of the world, are learning more about each other, they're -- where the whole program's designed to focus on the learning aspects of the education that occurs in the schools. Both the United States, both

here in Baghdad, sharing information, giving kids a chance to dialogue. We are -- In this investment we are assisting in every way we can to offer curriculum improvements, books, materials, things like that to the schools here in Baghdad. We just started this program within the last 30 days. And we're very excited with the start of the school year, the prospects for the way ahead to, to make something special out of this relationship.

MR. BASS:

I would just add that with respect to the infrastructure projects that have been coordinated through the PRT, we've concentrated on, on schools, on health clinics, and on portable water networks. And all of those projects have been in response to specific requests generated by the provincial council in conjunction and coordination with the respective ministries responsible for those areas. So they're very much a partnership in terms of us responding to needs that have been identified in trying to address the most important needs as expressed through the elected officials.

Going forward, we're doing things like helping the Amanat and the governate and, potentially, Baghdad University develop their ability to better plan infrastructure projects through some interesting technology called Geographic Information Systems.

It's software that allows you to take an image or a map and overlay specific information about infrastructure networks. And so for city planners, it's a very, very useful, valuable tool to see how you go about planning a very complicated infrastructure project. I think as all of you who live in the city know, replacing or repairing sewer and water networks can be very disruptive to neighborhoods and to the life of, of a community. And so to the extent we can help local officials develop better tools to plan that process, to minimize the disruption while improving the networks, I think that -- that's to the benefit of everyone.

AIDE: Next question. Sir?

REP5: Hello. Phil Black from CNN.

Sir, you spoke about the importance of the Iraqi government keeping its word to the Sons of Iraq.

MGEN HAMMOND: Yeah.

REP5: How concerned are you that that may not happen or that the Iraqi government may cause some offense to these forces? And what could the possible consequences of that be?

MGEN HAMMOND:

Well, first, the consequences could, could obviously be negative in that respect that if they don't fulfill a promise, if the government doesn't fulfill the promise to the Sons of Iraq, it could cause a fracture in this important program which would cause these guys to, to resort to violence. Because there's always someone outside such as al Qaida and certain resistance groups who are willing to offer them a better deal. So that's the consequence of not doing this right.

What's most encouraging, though, is that the first step in this whole process was, was initially to register, to register 51,000 Sons of Iraq with the Iraqi government so that they can get paid starting in November. And we succeeded in that. We've got -- A little over 51,000 have come forth and registered. Now, initially they were hesitant. They were concerned. They were -- They were certain that this just wouldn't work, that the government wouldn't fulfill its promise to them and that they could potentially be targeted. But what was amazing what was the Iraqi Security Forces kind of stepped up to the plate, and, and working with the IFCNR -- worked with these folks, sat down and listened to 'em, talked to them, committed to them that we're going to see this thing through. And through that, the basic, the forming of trust started

developing. The result was we get 51,000 that trust the government enough right now to register, to be a governate, to be a Son of Iraq under the governate of Iraq, under their control. So that's all positive. That's very positive. I mean, I can't tell you how positive that is.

Now, the challenge, of course, is going to be what happens in November when it's time for the first pay period? Are these 51,000 Sons of Iraq going to be paid? The window right now we're thinking is probably between 10 to 20th of November. That's a typical staggered pay period. And we're going to be watching that closely as is the Government of Iraq. It's clearly -- It's clearly my -- clear that the Government of Iraq fully intends to fulfill this promise. It's important. It's important to the Prime Minister. It's important to the Multi-National Force, the Multi-National Corps commanders here in Baghdad, and it's important to, to -- up and down the chain. I am very encouraged by what I've seen so far. But let's see what happens come payday. The conditions are set, without a doubt. Now we got to deliver. And I think they will. In fact, we're going to do a rehearsal of this whole -- the pay process here at the end of October. The 29th of October we're going to bring everyone together and we're going to conduct a thorough rehearsal to make sure we have the process

right. "We" being us in partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces, but the Government of Iraq has the process right to make this work. We've gone through a -- started a program this week where we're having formal ceremonies led by the Iraqi Security Forces where the, the Sons of Iraq are actually in a semi, you know, security military formation, are actually assuming, you know, transferring to the control of the Iraqi Security Forces. You've seen that.

So all indications, very positive. Fact still remains we've only worked the first stage of this thing. As I called it earlier, "Phase 1." We're going to have to see that through and make this -- and we'll have probably some challenges in November with the first pay period; nothing's perfect. I mean nothing's ever perfect the first time out. I anticipate there'll be some challenges. But I feel confident in stating that we're going to work through this together and we're going to see this thing through. We're going to make this work. "We" being the Government of Iraq working with the Iraqi Security Forces and the Coali- -- we're going to make this work.

Sir?

REP6: (Asks question in Arabic.) Radio Sawa.

INT: Haider al Kotb (ph) from Sawa. You indicated that there was improvement in security situation in Baghdad. The reason of also -- accomplishing some service project and rebuilding in Baghdad. Can you give us a little brief between 2007 through 2008 about these projects and funds that were assigned to these projects and these timetable? 2007 and 2008.

MR. BASS: Just to, to clarify your question, are you asking what projects were initiated in 2007 with PRT funding?

INT: (Relays question in Arabic.)

MR. BASS: I'm sorry. I lost the translation on that.

INT: I'm sorry. I'm sorry. A comparison... (Speaks in Arabic.) A comparison in projects accomplished between 2007, 2008. Since we say that the security has been improved, is there increased number --

MR. BASS: I see.

INT: -- of services or of projects accomplished in 2008 compared to 2007?

MR. BASS: Okay. Within the bounds of the projects that the PRT is responsible for, I can say most assuredly that there has been a substantial increase in the number of projects that we have been able to put out through the offices of some partners in the military where the contracting put out to tender, initiated work and completed work on those projects.

Many of the projects that I mentioned earlier were in fact initially put on the books as priorities in 2007 in initial conversations with the provincial council and other elected officials. But work was not able to start on those at that time, given the security environment. And so what we've been able to do this year, especially through the spring and summer, is to go back and basically dust off those projects and move them forward and actually realize those benefits. And, and we're starting to see those as these projects are completed.

MGEN HAMMOND: Gentleman in the back, please.

REP7: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: Good evening, sir. About SOI's, you had mentioned it was transitioned to the government and the government will take as much as possible because they're scared that some of them will go back to al Qaida. How can you -- How can you guarantee that these are clean people -- clean people, they were not bought or paid by al Qaida in the purpose of put 'em in the Iraq's security system?

(The gentleman continues to speak in Arabic without benefit of translation.)

INT: I couldn't understand the second question. One second, sir. I'll, I'll repeat it.

REP7: (Repeats question in Arabic.)

INT: You had mentioned that security is improving. Of course you're happy with Iraqi Security Forces. Is this going to affect the long-term -- the long-term agreement between Iraq and U.S. government? And is this going to affect also the withdrawal of Coalition Forces at certain time?

MGEN HAMMOND:

Well, that second question, I, I don't have an answer to. That's really outside the -- It's outside the area that I'm an expert in. Okay? So with respect to withdrawal of Coalition Forces or a Status of Forces Agreement or anything else, I'm not prepared to answer that.

But your first question I certainly would -- I'm eager to address. And the concern you expressed was for whether or not many of these Sons of Iraq were -- were still connected to al Qaida or had some sort of background that would -- criminal in nature. And what I can tell you is each one of these Sons of Iraq, all 51,000 of 'em, as we conducted the transition, we made every effort to try to check to make sure that they in fact were not -- were not part of a criminal background. We did -- We took the necessary steps to register them in what we call our "Bass and Hyde (ph) system." And the fact is that these 51,000 men all want to remain a part of the solution, not a part of the problem. Part of the solution in terms of sustainable security is really the positive story of the day. So I'm very encouraged by the fact that they have stepped forward, and I'm eager to see the Sons of Iraq program in this transfer and transition prove in the long term to do exactly what it is that the Prime Minister has directed that it should do, and that is a transition ultimately to long-term sustainable employment, and --

but for now, continue to contribute to security matters here in Baghdad.

We'll take one more question, okay? Young lady?

REP8: As Salamu 'Alaykum.

MGEN HAMMOND: 'Alaykum salam.

REP8: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: Qassim Arasit (ph). Arasit. General Hammond, do you think that al Qaida still have enough force to affect the success -- successful -- that success that were accomplished -- accomplished. Two, what do you say about random arrests and raids that are going on in Baghdad?

MGEN HAMMOND: Okay. First the al Qaida questions. Al Qaida is not defeated in Baghdad. They've been disrupted. But they still remain a threat and it remains their ambition to do everything within their power to hurt the people of Baghdad. It's their ambition to kill, maim or cripple men, women and children, Iraqis here in this city. Clearly that's their ambition. They've demonstrated time and time again,

without any conscience for life or decency or a good future. So having said that, they have not been defeated. We've made significant progress as I told you, as of recently, within the last week, detaining one of the key masterminds here in Baghdad. But we must continue to remain vigilant and stay on course with all the right security measures to at some point in the future, ultimately defeat al Qaida here in Baghdad.

Now, your other question with regard to -- I think you expressed concern for random arrests and such throughout Baghdad. I'm not aware of that. The Coalition Forces, in partnership with the Iraqi Security Forces and the Iraqi police, conduct operations in a manner that I think always places, number one, foremost, the respect of the people of Baghdad. We do not go about the business of random arrests or random military operations. If we have a military operation, it's by design and it's targeting someone or others who are trying to destroy the freedom and the securities of the people here in Baghdad. I'm very proud of the manner in which the Iraqi Security Forces conduct their business in a very disciplined way. Again, foremost with respecting the dignity of the people here in Baghdad.

Okay. Listen. I -- We'll see if we can get one more question. But I'd like to add that this young lady, I think, has been waiting. Please.

REP9: (Asks question in Arabic.)

INT: Al Iraqi. You mentioned the killing of Abu Rami, that he was responsible for many suicide VBID's and VBID's (sic) of which was called Maher az-Zubeidi. He conducted many other terrorist activities, some of it in Karadah. Who did he belong to? Which group he operated with? Was he behind the explosion and the indirect fire?

MGEN HAMMOND: Abu Rami belonged to his own group. He was the self-proclaimed Rusafa -- the al Qaida Rusafa network leader. He was wholly responsible for the planning and execution -- by my count over the last, about 34, 35 days -- six vehicle-borne IED attacks and two suicide vest attacks, which for the most part all took place vicinity of the Karadah peninsula. His entire goal in life was to kill the people of Baghdad. That's what he attempted to do. And he's been eliminated; we don't have to worry about him anymore.

Thank you. We're going to have to wrap this up, ladies and gentlemen. I will offer closing comments to my, my partner here, Mr. John Bass. Sir?

MR. BASS:

I would just note that as much progress as we've seen, it creates additional opportunities, and we will be working very hard in the weeks and months ahead to help our partners in the Iraqi government and across Baghdad civil society to take advantage of those opportunities. Also working very closely in partnership with our friends in uniform at Multi-National Division Baghdad.

MGEN HAMMOND:

Thank you. Thank you very much. Shukran Jazilan.

(End of conference.)